

NEWS AND NOTES FOR FLORIDA VETERANS

Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office
St. Petersburg, FL

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The "News and Notes for Florida Veterans" is published monthly by the Veterans Service Center, VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg, Florida, to provide information on VA benefit programs to veterans and dependents in Florida. The material presented does not have the effect of laws or regulations. Please send questions or comments on this newsletter to Veterans Service Center, ATTN: "News and Notes," PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731. We do not have the resources to maintain a mailing list for distribution to individuals; however this newsletter is available on the St. Petersburg VA Regional Office web site at www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete.

IT'S TAX TIME Here are the basics on VA benefits and Federal income taxes:

All VA benefits are exempt from taxation and should not be reported to IRS. Title 38 United States Code Section 5301: "Nonassignability and exempt status of benefits (a)(1) Payments of benefits due or to become due under any law administered by the Secretary shall not be assignable except to the extent specifically authorized by law, and such payments made to, or on account of, a beneficiary shall be exempt from taxation..." This includes payments made under the VA Work Study program.

VA does not issue W-2 or 1099 forms.

Secondary interest on VA benefits may be taxable. For example, if a VA beneficiary deposits his or her compensation check in an interest-bearing account, the interest is not tax exempt.

VA benefits are subject to collection for tax liens, i.e. in cases where the beneficiary owes the IRS.

Military Retired Pay: Veterans in receipt of military retired pay who are awarded VA compensation benefits retroactively may claim an exclusion from their income in the amount of VA compensation they would have received had they not been in receipt of military retired pay. Affected veterans should claim the exclusion by submitting the award letter showing the amount and effective date of compensation they would have received but for the receipt of military retired pay. IRS instructions tell affected veterans to submit a "VA Form 20-8993." VA Form 20-8993 is the award letter. If the veteran doesn't have it, VA can provide a letter in lieu of it.

VA Form 21-0172 Certification of Permanent and Total Disability for Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Purposes:

Claimants of the IRS Disability Income Exclusion are required to submit a certificate attesting to permanent and total disability. Under an agreement with the IRS, IRS will accept a VA certification on VA Form 21-0172, Certification of Permanent and Total Disability, based solely on an

existing rating of permanent and total disability in place of the required private physician's statement.

Veterans may request the VA Form 21-0172 by telephone or letter to the VA Regional Office. The request should provide sufficient information to identify the veteran's record, the year for which certification is needed, and the address to which the VA Form 21-0172 is to be sent.

VA PROVIDING FLORIDA VETERANS WITH DISABILITY VERIFICATION LETTERS FOR THE FIRST TIME (VA News Release) WASHINGTON – The

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it has sent out disability verification letters for the first time to more than 265,000 Florida veterans and surviving spouses who may be eligible for state or local tax exemptions. Some state tax laws provide veterans and their surviving spouses with state, county or local tax relief. VA assists veterans to receive these benefits by providing letters verifying their military service and disability evaluations. Although people can obtain these verification letters at any time by contacting their nearest VA regional office, VA performed a special computer run to automatically generate these letters for veterans. Florida veterans do not have to make a special request to obtain this verification.

Any veteran who receives VA disability compensation, but does not receive a letter or has any questions about the information contained in the letter should contact their local VA Regional Office by calling VA's toll-free number, 1-800-827-1000. VA encourages veterans and their families to check the letters carefully and contact VA if they have any concerns.

Florida veterans and survivors are advised to contact their county property tax appraiser's office on the Internet at <http://dor.myflorida.com/dor/property/appraisers.html> or tax collectors office at <http://dor.myflorida.com/dor/property/taxcollectors.html> with any questions about Florida state tax abatement programs.

SOME VETERANS TO SEE ANOTHER TRAVEL REIMBURSEMENT INCREASE

(VA News Release)
WASHINGTON – Service-disabled and low-income veterans who are reimbursed for travel expenses while receiving care at Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities will see an increase in their payments beginning January 9. A recently passed law allows VA to cut the amount it must withhold from their mileage reimbursement.

The deductible amount will be \$3 for each one-way trip and \$6 for each round trip -- with a cap per calendar-month of \$18, or six one-way trips or three round trips, whichever comes first. The previous deductible was \$7.77 for a one-way trip, and \$15.54 for a round trip, with a calendar-month cap of \$46.62.

In November, VA's second increase in the mileage reimbursement rate during 2008, from 28.5 cents to 41.5 cents a mile, was announced.

Service-disabled and low-income veterans are eligible to be reimbursed by VA for the travel costs of receiving health care or counseling at VA facilities. Veterans traveling for Compensation and Pension examinations also qualify for mileage reimbursement. VA can waive deductibles if they cause financial hardship.

NEARLY 11,000 SURVIVORS TO RECEIVE RETROACTIVE PAYMENTS BY NEW YEARS

(VA News Release December 24, 2008) The Department of Veterans Affairs has identified nearly 11,000 surviving spouses of deceased veterans who will receive a lump-sum payment before the New Year to correct an error in their VA benefits. Also documented were more than 73,000 who had been previously paid. VA officials are still tracking down eligible survivors.

At issue is a 1996 federal law that makes a surviving spouse eligible to receive the veteran's VA compensation or pension benefit for the month of the veteran's death. VA failed to properly implement that law in all cases.

Most likely to have been affected by this problem are surviving spouses who never applied for VA survivors' benefits following the death of a veteran. Eligible for the payment are surviving spouses of veterans who died after Dec. 31, 1996. The Department doesn't have current addresses for many of them, which makes the process of contacting them difficult.

VA has established a special Survivor Call Center (1-800-749-8387) for spouses who believe they may be eligible for this retroactive benefit. The Call Center is open Monday through Friday from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., Central Standard Time. Inquiries may also be submitted through the Internet at <http://www.vba.va.gov/survivorsbenefit.htm>.

IMPORTANT DATES IN JANUARY

January 19 Federal holiday – Martin Luther King Birthday
January 30 payments for January due

VA FACILITIES ADDRESSES AND TELEPHONE NUMBERS:

SUICIDE PREVENTION 1-800-273-8255

VA Regional Office, St. Petersburg - PO Box 1437, St. Petersburg, FL 33731 1-800-827-1000

Regional Processing Office, Atlanta, GA (education claims) - PO Box 100022, Decatur, GA 30031-7022 1-888-GIBILL1 (442-4551)
Telephone number for Chapter 30 self-verifications 1-877-823-2378

VA EFT Information Hotline (electronic funds transfer - direct deposit) 1-877-838-2778

Veterans Health Administration Toll-Free Hotline (medical care) - 1-877-222-8387

VA Health Revenue Service (information on amounts owed to VA Medical Centers) 1-866-793-4591

VA Insurance Center, Philadelphia (VA Insurance) - PO Box 42954, Philadelphia, PA 19101 1-800-669-8477

VA Health Administration Center (CHAMPVA and Spina Bifida health care) -
CHAMPVA inquiries: PO Box 65023, Denver, CO 80206-5023
CHAMPVA claims: PO Box 65024, Denver, CO 80206-5024
Spina Bifida inquiries and claims: PO Box 65025, Denver, CO 80206-5025 1-800-733-8387

National Cemeteries

10,000 Bay Pines Blvd N, Bay Pines FL 727-398-9426
6502 SW 102nd Ave, Bushnell FL 33513 352-793-7740
6501 S State Rd 7, Lake Worth, FL 33467 561-649-6489
4083 Lannie Rd, Jacksonville FL 32218 904-358-3510
Naval Air Station, Pensacola FL 850-453-4108/4846
9810 State Hwy 72, Sarasota FL 877-861-9840

National Cemetery Administration Office of Memorial Programs (headstones and markers) - 5109 Russell Rd Quantico VA 22134-3903 1-800-697-6947

Loan Guaranty Eligibility Center (certificates of eligibility) PO Box 20729, Winston-Salem, NC 27120 1-888-244-6711

Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) Unit - Chicago VA Regional Office 1-800-829-4833

INTERNET SITES OF INTEREST:

VA Web Site: www.va.gov

VA Web Automated Reference Materials System (WARMS) www.warms.vba.va.gov

St. Petersburg VA Regional Office:

www.vba.va.gov/ro/south/spete

Property Management (sale of VA-repossessed homes): www.ocwen.com

Florida Dept of Veterans Affairs: www.floridavets.org

"Florida Vets First:" www.FloridaVetsFirst.com

Library of Congress (information on pending legislation) thomas.loc.gov